

Shoplifting: The need for greed

The different causes of shoplifting share one common result

By Akeda Thomas
Correspondent

Millions of people steal from retail stores each year. Is it a need or is it a greed? The vast majority of adult offenders have no idea about how or why they become a thief. It is even a mystery to them why they continue to steal even after they have been caught.

A sophomore majoring in Psychology at St. Augustine's College was a former shoplifter who recalls that she had no real reason to steal, but that it brought a lot of excitement to her.

"I was young when I started," she said. "I had everything I wanted, but I became addicted to the thrill of stealing and not getting caught." Several studies have shown that a person's addiction to shoplifting can develop quickly when the excitement generated from "getting away with it" produces a chemical reaction resulting in what shoplifters will tell you is the "true reward", rather than the merchandise itself.

In addition to feeling good, shoplifters quickly observe that this "high" temporarily eliminates their feelings of anger, frustration, depression or other unhappiness in their lives.

Realizing how easy it is to get that "high" feeling, they are pulled toward doing it again, just one more time, finally they are addicted. Even though most non-professional shoplifters feel guilty, ashamed or remorseful about what they did, they cannot seem to resist temptation.

Another St. Aug. student who is a Junior Criminal Justice major admitted that he used to steal because of financial reasons. He said he was just laid off and the money wasn't there to support him or his family.

"I feel the reason I did that was because of my circumstances," he said. "There is not a day that goes

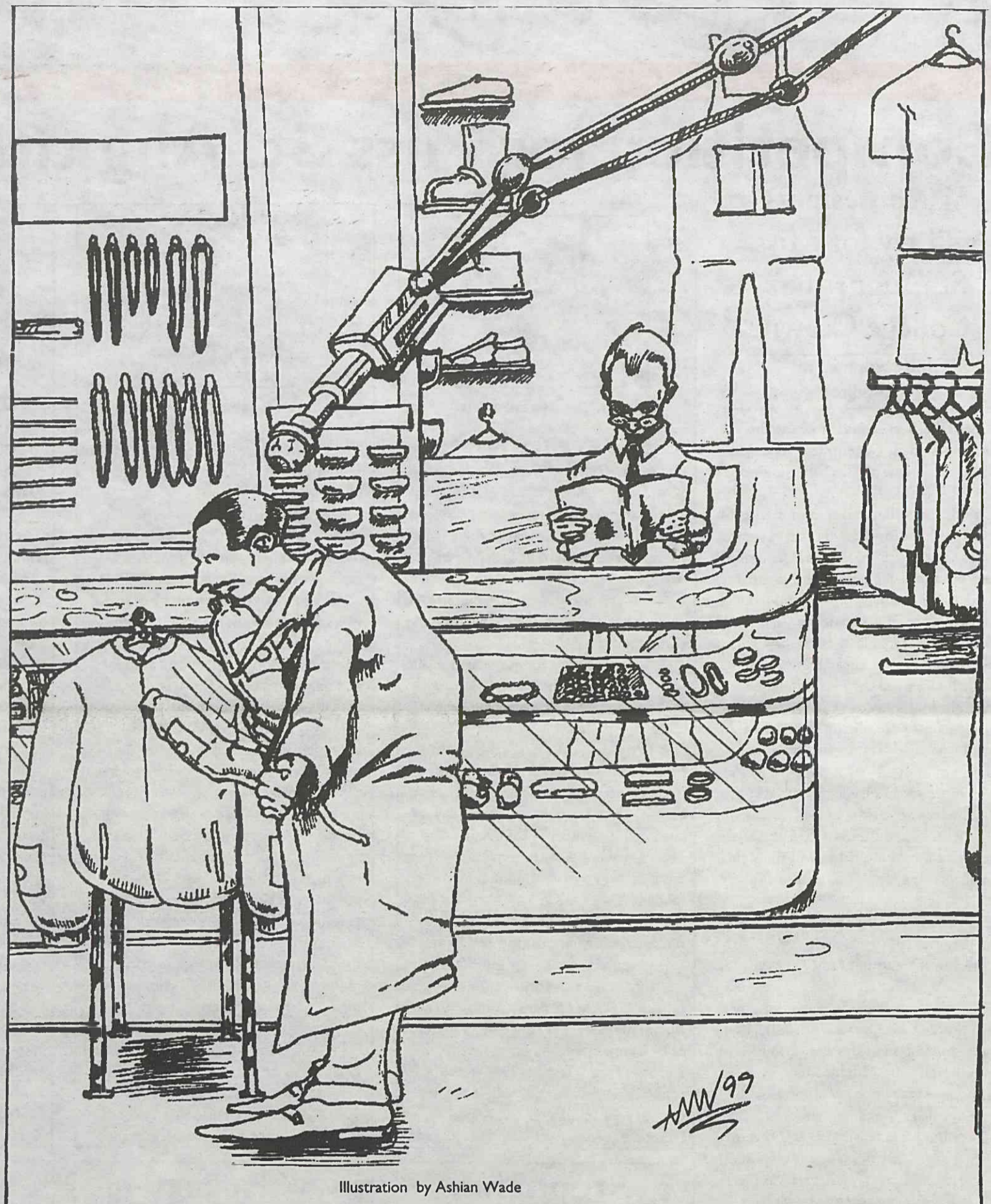


Illustration by Ashian Wade

by that I don't think about what I did."

For most, shoplifting is a way of dealing with situations in their life that they cannot handle. Unfortunately for them this is a temporary way of escaping the issues that they may have. Many admit that even if they get caught it would still be hard for them to stop stealing.

"It's not fair that I got caught, but I do blame myself for being so careless," the psychology major said. "I have stopped stealing, but being incarcerated did not contribute to my decision, counseling helped me change."

According to Shoplifters Alternative, a national non-profit organization, there is an estimated 23 million shoplifters in our nation today, or roughly one in every 11 Americans. About 25% of apprehended

shoplifters are juveniles and 75% are Adults. It is estimated that retailers lose about \$25 million a day to shoplifting.

Shoplifters Alternative is a division of Shoplifters Anonymous, Inc. The organization works with the law enforcement and courts to help people overcome shoplifting problems by providing rehabilitative programs and ongoing support services. There are also educational services available such as Youth Educational Shoplifting (Y.E.S) and Shoplifters Alternative Course.

These educational programs help children and adults understand how shoplifting affects the lives of other people, not just stores. They teach about the law and its consequences, how much they risk for small rewards and how shoplifting can be addictive. The programs help

On Campus Counseling Services

If you feel that you need counseling for this problem or any other problems that you may be having, feel free to contact the following on campus services:

Student Development Center which includes counseling for students and job opportunities. 516-4242

- ◆ Mrs. Jerelene Carver, Director
- ◆ Ms. Phyllis Hilliard, Placement Center
- ◆ Mrs. Jacinta Allmond, Counselor
- ◆ Mrs. Lori Alexander, Counselor
- ◆ Mrs. Renee Palmer, ADA Compliance Officer
- ◆ Mrs. Sheryl Ximines, Assistant Administrative

shoplifters understand how their own personal and social pressures can trigger shoplifting and explain what they can do to put shoplifting behind them forever.

"It's good that they have programs like shoplifters

Alternative, it breaks people out of their habit of stealing," the psychology major said. "I paid for what I did and I hope this program will be successful in helping to cut down on shoplifting."